Listening in a Time of War:
On Violence,
Peacemaking,
And the Rhetoric of Listening

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ABSTRACT

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The U.S. state has murdered more Black men, women, trans, and gender queer people in 2015 than in the most deadly year of lynchings (Merelli). 2015 was in fact the deadliest year for trans women of color (Adams). And yet 2015 was also the year that Hillary Clinton began her campaign for president on a white feminist platform, which Black Lives Matter activists rightly called out for being racist. One year later, the sexual assault and murder of a white-passing UT student unleashed a flood of both white sympathy and anti-black symbolic violence.

This thesis explores the violence than runs through our rhetoric, particularly as it relates to the intersections of race and gender, and wonders about the possibility for resisting symbolic violence and engaging peacemaking by listening with an intersectional lens.

Acknowledgements

One day I was at *Savers* arguing with myself over whether or not to buy a 99 cent portfolio for my thesis because I didn't know if I would ever actually finish it. A stranger overheard me and gave me $10 to treat myself when I finally turned in my thesis. I still have the $10 and the portfolio and I still remember the encouragement he gave me that day. That one moment symbolizes for me the two-year process of writing this thesis. I almost quit twice, but help came from unexpected places, from people who I've known intimately to people who've been strangers, and I thank each and every one of them for walking with me, in spirit, in mind, and in my heart: Dr. Rasha Diab, Dr. Jerome Bump, my sisters, Sabina and Sophia, Neil Foley, Angela Hinz, Mónica Teresa Ortiz, Sophia Poitier, Tosin Awofeso, Billy Yates, Dr. Judith Rosenberg, Julia Quiñones, Teresa Cheng, Marcela Ramirez, Alonzo Mendoza, Kamene Dornubari-Ogidi, Yatzel Sabat, Irma S., Chani Nicholas, Pace Davis, Dr. Richard J. Reddick, Wura Natasha-Ogunji, Dr. Christen Smith, and Dr. Josefina Castillo.

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Preface

I'm going to make a disclaimer. I'd like to address the contradictions of writing about violence, peacemaking, and the rhetoric of listening in the Plan II Honors Program at the University of Texas at Austin, in the colonial settlement known as the United States of America. The following anti-theses serve as an avenue for personal disclosure, self-reflection, and critical thought about the rhetoric of listening. Indeed, rhetorical listening, is designed to "foster in listeners critical th[ought]" (Ratcliffe 26). As a friend once told me, without critical thought, radical thought is impossible, and as Angela Davis so poignantly clarifies, "radical simply means 'grasping things at the root" (Feminist Quotes).

So, let me begin with America. America is named after Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian cartographer who mapped South America's eastern coast and the Caribbean Sea in the 16th century. Realizing that he wasn't mapping India (you were so wrong, Columbus), he claimed to have "discovered" a whole new land mass (Vespucci). Not Europe, not Asia, but "…a continent, new lands, and an unknown world" (Vespucci). This "New World," while new to Amerigo, was neither "new" nor "unknown" to the nations who for generations and generations lived on this land. Borrowing words from poet and spoken word artist, Kyla Lacey, "How the hell do you discover some shit that wasn't even missing to begin with?" (All Def Poetry). The geographic and metaphysical space I'm writing in is bathed in violence. As Alicia Garza, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, pointed out:

> What can be more violent than the process of building a nation when there are already people living, existing, building families for generations. And then a group of people comes in and says, I like what y'all got here. This is gorgeous. I'd like it for myself. So let me see how to get rid of you. And then you kill, and you imprison, and you maim, and you steal the dignity from other human beings. You build things that you want. You build things that generate money. You make us make that money for you. You maybe move us off somewhere where we can't be seen. Somewhere where we're not considered to be a problem. Out of sight out of mind. Place us on reservations. Try to indoctrinate us with your own ideas. And then you say I can't imagine why they're so upset. My god, why are they so angry, violent, aggressive? (Sydney)

As Garza suggests, the creation of "America" points to the violent legacy of colonization, the genocide of indigenous people, the forced labor of kidnapped Africans and their children. And while the dominant American power structure manifests violence of all forms, it marks its victims and those that challenge America's innocence as "violent" (Sydney). America is and always will be a nation built on the legacy of "stolen land and stolen labor" ("Black Lives").

And there are a number of public universities in the U.S. that exist today because of this theft, displacement, and genocide. Before beginning her address at the 2012 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in St. Louis, Missouri, Malea Powell affirmed: "I want to take a moment and honor the indigenous peoples of this place, those from the Illini confederacy who are my relatives, along with the ancestors of the Missouri, Osage, Shawnee, Kickapoo, and Meskwaki peoples upon whose lands St. Louis and its suburbs are built" (Powell). I don't know the peoples who were indigenous to Austin, but I'd like to recognize, in the same spirit Powell has, that the University of Texas is built on colonized land.

Somewhat ironically, this thesis about symbolic violence will live on a shelf at a university constructed on violence.

Though I draw on theories and practices from a variety of disciplines both within and without the Academy, in general, I'm writing in the discipline of rhetoric. I associate rhetoric with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle). Since Aristotle, scholars have expanded the realm of what constitutes rhetoric to include all forms of language, or what rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke called "symbolic action" (Herrick 210). Indeed, the realm of rhetoric is vast and encompasses a variety of texts that include verbal and nonverbal communication, images, as well as listening and silence (Bokser, Foss and Littlejohn, Glenn and Ratcliffe). But Aristotle is still widely considered the father of the Western discipline of rhetoric. What is often overlooked is that Aristotle defended the practice of slavery ("Philosophers"). In *Politics,* he noted*:* "For that some should rule and others be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient" ("Philosophers"). Aristotle also said: "And indeed the use made of slaves and of tame animals is not very different; for both with their bodies minister to the needs of life" ("Philosophers"). Granted, he wasn't the only one. (Plato and Thomas Aquinas thought this too) ("Philosophers"). But I wonder, as many others before me have, "if we define rhetoric only by what elite Western men wrote to train elite Western boys for public responsibilities, what are we leaving out that may be useful for today's more diverse audiences?" (Donawerth 167).

More importantly, as Aisha Karim and Bruce Lawrence, editors of *On Violence: A Reader*, so poignantly point out: "the epistemic lesson to be learned and relearned, then applied again and again, is the need to confront rhetorical violence. At the heart of rhetorical violence, which is also cognitive violence, is the assumption that Europeans—together with Americans, Australians, and other Anglos—are intrinsically superior to the rest of humankind" (11). We embody this assumption when we listen to "Europeans—together with Americans, Australians, and other Anglos", in other words white people, more than any other race. Even when the subject matter is about people who are not white. The violence that runs through our language and symbolic expressions, then, is tied up with white supremacy. One way we condone this violence is by continuing this tradition of centering Europeans/Anglos and their texts, experiences, and theories while not listening to scholars, writers, philosophers, poets, artists, activists, and organizers of color. For this reason, it is important for me to reflect on the extent to which my thesis is complicit in or resists this dimension of violence.

Let me come a little closer to home. I'm going to hand in my thesis to the Plan II Honors program. But I would be remiss if I did not say a few words about the ways in which the program I'm a part of is complicit in the rhetorical and symbolic violence I speak of. On the Plan II website, in the section called "What's so great about [Plan II]?" there is a quote from an alumna which reads: "…Plan II is the ideal community, a microcosm of the 'real' world…." ("What's So Great"). I imagine that this alumna simply wanted to praise the program that gave them the opportunity to access all kinds of resources and privileges. I can certainly understand that, having benefited from the privileges of being a Plan II student myself. I don't think this

alumna or the designers of the Plan II website intended to perpetuate the myth that the "real world" is made up of primarily white people ("What's So Great"). But if you look at the faculty listed for the Plan II Honors program on the College of Liberal Arts website, you may notice this trend: Plan II's "top-notch professors" are mostly male and mostly white. 97% of the full professors are white or white-passing; 77% are men, 0% are women of color.[1] 92% of the associate professors are white or white-passing; 68% are men; 3% are women of color. 86% of the assistant professors are white or white-passing. 75% of the senior lecturers are white or white-passing. So, the "ideal community" this student speaks of is dominated by white men and some white women. My father would have been one of the token few male professors of color. And women of color professors would not have fallen within the purview of this Plan II alumna's idea of an "ideal community." I came up with these percentages from the information that was available on the website, but I realize there may be errors in my calculations. Given the statistics I disclosed above, and also given my own experience as a Plan II student in predominantly white classes taught by predominately white professors, it appears that de facto segregation and racial exclusion, intentional or not, is still very much a part of the culture of Plan II. And as Oscar Romero once said, "exclusion…constitutes primal cause [of violence], from which the rest flows naturally" (Romero 166).

And finally, a few words about me. My name is Bianca. That means "white" in Italian. Fittingly, I look really white and I grew up in one of the whitest neighborhoods in Austin: Hyde

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[2] According to Koa Beck's article titled "The Trouble with 'Passing' for Another

Park.[2] According to a recent study, the racial composition of my neighborhood was not a coincidence (Tretter 5). A white man named Monroe Shipe, who arrived in Austin at the end of the 19th century, developed and promoted the neighborhood as a place "exclusively for white people" (Schwaller). And according to a 2012 report from the University of Texas at Austin, "[Shipe's] antipathy toward non-whites became embedded in the very way Austin grew" (Schwaller). I grew up hearing about how Austin is the liberal capital of Texas; but white supremacy is a central part of the formation of the city and continues to influence the geography and culture of Austin today. Black and brown people who have lived in Austin for generations are experiencing alarming rates of displacement, exclusion, and gentrification by new waves of white migration, or settler colonialism. For more information, you can Google what happened to the piñata store, "Jumpolin," owned by a Mexican-Americans or Austin's rapidly shrinking black population. The neighborhood in which I grew up is the belly of the beast of white supremacy in Austin. And while Shipe "shape[d] Austin's…geography for generations," my neighborhood and the segregated schools I attended as a youth shaped the geography of my mind in ways I cannot escape (Tretter 1). Everything I write will be filtered through white eyes.

I am part-Mexican, part-Irish, and part-German and was born to a Chicano dad and white feminist mom in the United States. While I am part Mexican, and I am very proud to be, I have

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[2] According to Koa Beck's article titled "The Trouble with 'Passing' for Another Race/Sexuality/Religion" in *The Guardian*, "'racial passing' or 'passing' was originally coined to define the experience of mixed raced individuals, particularly in America, who were accepted as a member of a different racial group, namely white. Although passing dates all the way back to the 18th century, the term didn't prominently surface in the American lexicon until around the 19th century, specifically with a slew of literature. Mark Twain and Charles Chesnutt were among the early American novelists to explore this phenomenon, but Nella Larson's 1929 novel *Passing* was the first English language book to explicitly brand itself with the term" (Beck 1-2).

white/passing privilege. I am cisgender, able-bodied, and, very soon here, will be college-educated. And from my appearance, I also have heterosexual privilege, though I am queer. But for the purpose of this thesis what really matters is that I am a white woman in a white supremacist culture and context. I share my privileges and some biographical information because what I am about to discuss and claim will be filtered through a very subjective and therefore also partially-blind perspective. My subjectivity stems from my experience as both a victim and an agent of symbolic violence. And if I am not proactively working –both individually and with others—to recover from the interconnected pathologies of white supremacy/racism, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, xenophobia, islamophobia, etc., by listening, I will be used as a weapon against myself and people I love.

A final note on the creative writing/journalistic bent of my thesis. I know this is somewhat unconventional in an academic paper. But in order to research and understand the rhetoric of listening, I had to apply the principles I was learning to my everyday life and actually practice listening. Borrowing words from Glenn and Ratcliffe:

> To listen...is to take a risk. Offering a response not typically sanctioned in the academy or dwelling in ideas that challenge one's privilege are certainly risks….It also means risking failure….(262)

With all these disclaimers in mind, I share my exploration of symbolic violence, the potential for peacemaking, and how people are listening (nor not) in these times of war.[3]

[3] I use the term "war" both literally and rhetorically. War represents the constant state of what Oscar Romero calls "structural violence, social injustice, exclusion…, and political repression" that for many Americans of non-dominant groups and people around the planet, is the direct result of what bell hooks calls "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (46).

Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, violence is "The deliberate exercise of physical force against a person, property, etc.; physically violent behavior or treatment" ("violence, n."). While this definition is perhaps the most common in terms of how we identify violence, it speaks to only one form of violence: physical violence. But violence comes in many forms—direct, structural, symbolic, systemic, and cultural, to name a few (Galtung). And there are a number of theories of violence that are "as varied as the practices within which they occur" (Karim and Lawrence 7). The dictionary definition leads us to believe that violence is neutral, apolitical, and ahistorical but violence, as Aisha Karim and Bruce Lawrence, remind us, "can never be morally or politically neutral" (6). It is always and everywhere politically and historically situated.

There are some problems with using the dictionary definition to conceptualize violence. America has had a problematic relationship with the concept of personhood and property since its inception (Butler 8). Indeed, until the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, in 1865, African Americans were not considered full human beings or persons. Rather, they were considered the "property" of white men, their slave masters. And Ava DuVernay's recent documentary *13th* explains, embedded in the language of the 13th Amendment is a clause that allows for the continuation of confusing people with property (00:01:56-00:03:24). Anyone who

is convicted of a crime to this day is legally considered the property of the state (DuVernay 00:03:24-00:03:41). Furthermore, generally the destruction of property is considered violent and problematic. However, when the state infringes on the property of Native/First Nations people, for example, it is considered building a nation (Sydney). And when black people protest in the streets against direct and structural violence and buildings are damaged, the media defines the protest as "violent" (McKenzie). Or, to put it in Mia McKenzie's more brilliant terms, "The killing of unarmed Black people, including children, by police: not violence. The destruction of white people's *things*: violence" (McKenzie). The property of those deemed "property" is always considered up for grabs. So, talk of violence is plagued by a double standard.

The focus of my thesis is on the "violence embodied in language and its forms" or symbolic violence (Žižek 1). By definition, symbolic violence is "relations and mechanisms of domination and power which do not arise from overt physical force or violence on the body" (Žižek 2). Karim and Lawrence explain that these "modes of domination," in particular, "racism, xenophobia, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ageism…are integral to systemic violence" (9). By nature, systems of violence are complex, nuanced, and as Black feminists have theorized, overlapping and "interlocking"—indeed "intersectional" (Adewumni, Collins, Crenshaw, Davis, hooks, Lorde, The Combahee). Our use or misuse of language can uncover or mask the intersectional nature of symbolic violence.

The concept of intersectionality was born out of a long tradition of black feminist politics and practices, but the term "intersectionality" was coined in the 80s by leading scholar on critical

race theory, Kimberlé Crenshaw (Adewumni). Intersectionality was designed to address the fact that gender discrimination, taken in isolation, centers the voices of white women and that racial discrimination, taken in isolation, centers the voices of black men particularly in the field of law (Adewumni). Black women, who are oppressed on more than one "axis" (e.g. racism and sexism), are often invisible in both legal and also rhetorical constructs. Intersectionality was coined to "de-marginalize," recognize, and re-center black women and their experience of systemic violence. Since the 80s, I have heard this term used frequently in organizing spaces in attempts to address the intersections of race and gender as well as sexuality, class, immigration status, and other lines. Confronting systemic violence through a "single-axis" rhetorical lens, therefore, has the effect of further marginalizing people (Zeilinger).

Rhetoric is deeply connected to the process of violence. Indeed, the rhetoric we use can either reinforce or dissolve other expressions of violence. It is through our symbols, our framing, our tongues, our silences, and our (in)ability to listen that we resist or comply with systems of domination and violence. Consider the following examples.

Figure 1: Taken from Daniel Hernandez's blog post titled "Intersections": danielhernandez.typepad.com/Daniel_hernandez/2014/03/ezln-20-anos-20fotos.html

[Image description: Indigenous people and mestizos wearing black ski masks and red *pañuelos* and brown shirts, stand at attention with guns]. I showed this image to a group of primarily white people at the Plan II 2016 Thesis Symposium.[4] I asked if it represented violence or peace. The overwhelming majority of the group said it represented violence. For them, that brown people wearing masks and holding guns symbolizes violence seemed obvious. But let's consider the context. The photo was taken at an assembly of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista Army of National Liberation, EZLN) in Chiapas, Mexico.

On January 1, 1994, the Zapatistas declared war on the Mexican state and on global capitalism (Vodovnik). This was the "first indigenous armed uprising in Latin America in the internet age" (Chaparro). Their armed insurrection was in response to 500 years of war (Vodovnik). This war against indigenous people on the Western hemisphere began in the 1500s with European colonization aided by people like Amerigo Vespucci (Gordon). Their weapons were not their guns, though they protected themselves and their communities holding them (Chaparro). Subcomandante Marcos famously said "our words are our weapons" (Vodovnik). "The problem with war is not the holding of weapons, it's their use" (Chaparro).

Almost a quarter of a century later, the Zapatistas continue to be a symbol of resistance to the violence of colonization and teachers of peace culture. They organized themselves into autonomous communities, which have grown since their initial uprising. Their principles and

[4] This group was made up of around 30 members of Plan II. Of those, 3-5 were visibly people of color. I do not have the official demographic break-down of the Plan II Program, but from my experience as a student for four years, the faculty and students are predominantly white.

practices are captured in some of their sayings: “lead by obeying,” “propose, don’t impose,” “represent, don’t replace,” “anti-power, against power,” “convince, don’t defeat,” “everything for everyone, nothing for ourselves,” and “construct, don’t destroy” (”Zapatista”). The world that they intentionally create everyday is a world in which “peace is not far off” (Vodovnik). And over two decades after they occupied San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, they are giving food and aid to striking teachers in the Indigenous community of Nochixtlan in Oaxaca, Mexico (Telesur). The teachers are resisting state-sanctioned violence and repression (Telesur).

Now consider a second image. [Image description: The sky is blue. The grass is green. Sunshine filters through the trees. And there’s an orange glow on the front of what looks like a wooden cabin with palm trees growing by its side.] I asked the same group of people at the Symposium what they thought of this image: without hesitation, the majority said ‘peace.’

Figure 2: Taken from the photo gallery on the website of the Whitney Plantation. http://www.whitneyplantation.com/photo-gallery.html

Then I uncovered the caption of the photograph. The room fell silent. This photo of "peace" is the living quarters of enslaved Africans on the Whitney Plantation in Wallace County, Louisiana.

Upon first glance, we often make assumptions about what peace and violence look like. One photo represents 246+ years of domination, oppression, and the enslavement of an entire people (PBS).[5] The other represents oppressed people rising up and fighting for their land and liberty in response to "500 years of war" (Vodovnik). If we don't become critical of the way we symbolize and recognize peace and violence, we are destined to perpetuate symbolic violence.

Two people can look at the same image or listen to the same words and have vastly different experiences of it. The answers the Plan II students gave at the Thesis Symposium during my presentation reflect a fundamental problem with speaking about violence and peacemaking: our privileges shape what we see (or don't) and how we listen (or not). And our privileges makes it hard for us to listen to those people and texts that we are conditioned not to see. An artist named Roger Peet explored the idea of blindness that white people have towards violence directed at people of color (Mirk). In a recent project he showed a series of prints depicting white people appropriating Native American, Black, and Asian cultures but once you put on what he calls the "whiteness goggles," the violence embedded in the images disappears (Mirk). "White audiences specifically are forced to consider the blinders that race creates: one of the privileges of being white is the ability to ignore racism," notes writer Sarah Mirk (Mirk). "All too often, the reality of the white supremacy is rendered invisible to people who don't want

[5] I say "+" because the enslavement of Black people in America has not ended.

to see it" (Mirk). Indeed, "violence can never be seen outside its own structure, which operates at multiple levels—historical, rhetorical, practical. The rhetorical level is the most difficult to decode" (Karim and Lawrence 8).

That's why I draw on Karim and Lawrence's rhetorical framework for understanding violence as it relates to rhetoric. In the introduction to their anthology, they wonder "what is the relationship between language, physical violence, and non-violence?" (10). And suggest that:

> superseding all other questions and also informing them is the central question without which the focus on violence becomes a mere reflex of dominant stereotypes with no analytical advance: what is the relationship between knowledge about violence and action? That is, how does one speak about violence without replicating and perpetuating it? And how can one apply knowledge about violence to advocate strategies that either reduce its incidence or deflect its force? (Karim and Lawrence 10)

The trouble is that the very rhetoric we use can communicate symbolic violence. Karim and Lawrence's questions inspired a lot of my thinking on the (im)possibility of listening as a strategy to confront what they term "rhetorical violence" (10). To unmask the hidden intersections of overlapping oppressions and resist perpetuating symbolic violence, we must engage a rhetoric of listening.

I frame the rhetoric of listening historically and politically. Herman Beavers, Professor of English and Africana Studies at Penn, talks about the vast examples of "aurality" (or listening) in African American literature (Beavers). I also draw from the theoretical framework of Krista Ratcliffe, author of *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, and Whiteness*, which situates

listening within the discipline of rhetoric. Ratcliffe introduces what she termed "rhetorical listening" using an anecdote about how she had been criticized for her feminist scholarship, which ignored race. This is not surprising given the troubled history of white women's feminism (hooks, Lorde). The four moves of rhetorical listening she identifies represent a "stance of openness a person may choose to take in relation to a person, text, or culture," with a focus on the intersection of gender and race (17). The rhetoric of listening is thus a pathway to intersectionality. Therefore, Ratcliffe and Beavers' conceptions of the rhetoric of listening complement Kimberlé Crenshaw's conception of intersectionality as a theoretical framework used to unmask symbolic violence and promote peacemaking (Adewumni).

I analyze two primary case studies of rhetorical texts. The first is the rhetoric surrounding Haruka Weiser's murder. My goal with the first case study is to highlight the violence embedded in the language surrounding an incident of physical (direct) violence and show how listening with an intersectional lens can promote peacemaking. The second case study is of Hillary Clinton's rhetoric in a recent confrontation with Black Lives Matter activists surrounding the structural violence of mass incarceration. In contrast, the second case is an example of what not listening looks like in. Both are current events and speak to the symbolic violence embedded in the way we talk about violence through a "single-axis," "anti-intersectional," or white feminist framework (Crenshaw, Zeilinger). My hope is to raise questions about the affordances and limitations of listening as a tool for confronting and recovering from this problematic practice. Both cases, as well as my reflections from the embodied experience of listening in my own life, are to be understood against the backdrop of an

ongoing covert and overt war against people of color in the United States due to the language of white supremacy.

In a sense, my thesis is part philosophical musing, part anthropological inquiry, part rhetorical analysis, and part semi-autobiographical reflection on my organizing experience at the intersections of labor, race, and gender and personal recovery from the pathology of white supremacy. I wonder about the possibility and necessity of listening as a rhetorical strategy for resisting violence and engaging an intersectional peacemaking praxis (Villanueva, xi).[6] I wonder how we listen in times of endless war. What would it look like to live in a world of listeners?

[6] Paraphrasing popular education theorist, Paulo Freire's, conception of "praxis," Victor Villanueva writes: "This is what he calls praxis: reflection and action through language. Praxis is what I'm attempting to do here, more than providing a self-serving story, either glorious me or woe-is-me. What I'm attempting is to provide a problematic based on sets of experience: an experience which leads to a theory, a theory that recalls an experience; reflections on speculations, speculations on polemics to reflections—all with an aim at affecting what might happen in classrooms, the sites of action" (Villanueva, xi). Peacemaking rhetoric, therefore, is also peacemaking praxis.

Chapter One: The Rhetoric of Listening

In the words of Dr. Herman Beaver, professor of English at the University of Pennsylvania, "…listening and talking are associated with different parts of the body. One is necessary to making one's wishes and feelings known; the other is necessary to being in a community, to knowing what others long for—it represents an avenue to empathy" (1). Listening is an "avenue," a pathway, a communicative act and community-oriented process (1). And without it, we cannot meet others in struggle. As black lesbian feminist poet Audre Lorde explains, "Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression." (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 112).

Listening is understudied in the U.S., but as Herman Beavers notes, it is important to "understand aurality [or listening] as being an important analogue to orality, to speaking" (1). While listening—as a rhetorical device—is not new, it has not been considered to the extent "voice" has in African American literature (Beavers 1). The right to speak and the burden of listening have always been tied up with oppression and the "policing" of "black speech" (Beavers 1). Oppressors are forever commanding "silence." Whereas the oppressed, resisting, are forever saying, as Lorde so poignantly has, "…I speak…[for] there are so many silences to be broken" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 40). The mandate of speaking is particularly important when your speech has been restricted, repressed, or denied. In other words, the burden of listening has always been pushed onto the oppressed. The privilege of speaking has been reserved for the privileged members of dominant groups (i.e. historically, property-owning white men and also privileged white women). And yet, as Beavers suggests: "While those in power could control

speech, they could only control listening by imposing silence" (1-2). Indeed, for black people and other oppressed people, listening was a form of resistance and a strategy for survival (Beavers 1-2).

Offering an example from Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in which listening serves as a catalyst for liberation, Beavers writes:

> Early on in the narrative we get [a] passage from Douglass, describing the moment when he discovered 'the pathway from slavery to freedom.' He hears his master, Thomas Auld, speak...[and] relates Auld's words 'sank deep into [his] heart.' [Douglass, 78] In a fashion, that mirrors a common rhetorical device of the nineteenth century, where listening was not understood as a physical practice but rather one located in proximity to the emotional seat; listening was a measure of the "openness" of the heart as receptacle. Douglass locates the critical consciousness Auld incites in him, not in the brain, but in the breast. Furthermore, listening to Auld's words incites Douglass to strive for physical and intellectual freedom: listening "only served to inspire me with a desire and a determination to learn. (1)

Through Beavers' analysis, we come to understand that listening 1) is a rhetorical device, 2) is read as a "measure of the 'openness' of the heart as receptacle," 3) is conducive to getting free ("discover[ing] the pathway from slavery to freedom") and 4) can "serve to inspire…a desire and a determination to learn" (1). Listening, then, is not just about the ears—it is about the emotional knowing and learning of the heart. Listening is a catalyst and can incite change and growth – both personal and collective. And while listening is not more or less important than "making one's wishes and feelings known," or speaking, it is necessary for communication and "being in a community" (Beavers 1).

In communication and community, it often seems favorable to seek common ground and appeal to the idea of sameness. Indeed the word community comes from the Old French "comunité" which means "commonness" or "everybody" ("Community"). This is also true in the field of rhetoric. Kenneth Burke, arguably one of "the most influential of 20th century rhetorical theorists," said as much when he coined the term "identification" as a necessary precursor to persuasion (Herrick 210, Ratcliffe 55). But this idea of appealing only to commonalities is problematic. Quoting Diana Fuss and Franz Fanon, Ratcliffe suggests this rhetorical maneuvering constitutes "symbolic violence" (59). As Lorde once said, "…community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 112). And in her published letter to Mary Daly, Lorde wrote "The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences….To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 70). Ignoring race and racism, which affects women of different races differently, makes community between white women and women of color impossible (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 70, Ratcliffe 47). "Locating identifications across commonalities *and* differences" is in fact one of the four moves of "rhetorical listening Ratcliffe identifies;" all four moves are listed below:

> 1) promoting an understanding of self and other,
> 2) proceed from an accountability logic,
> 3) locating identifications across commonalities and differences
> and
> 4) analyzing the claims as well as the cultural logics within which
> claims function. (26)

In the absence of having the lived experience of being oppressed on more than one axis of oppression (e.g. gender), one needs tools to think, speak, and listen in terms of intersections of multiple lines of oppression. These four moves may provide a pathway to an intersectional peacemaking praxis.

As part of the first move, Ratcliffe says "understanding" is the goal of rhetorical listening (27). What I think is most enduring about her conception of this rhetorical move, is the inversion of the term "understanding" to "standing under" (28). Ratcliffe does this to help us see how changing the term from a noun to a verb implies an emphasis on action. It also implies actively embracing humility (28). Taking a stance of humility reminds us that we are not superior. Instead, humility encourages us to continue learning, be open, and remain teachable. But this can feel dangerous and go against a desire to remain in control. For "listening with the intent to understand opens [people] up…to being challenged, convicted, and hurt by the truth" (Ratcliffe 34).

Accountability is the cornerstone of the second move. Ratcliffe references bell hooks' "Race and Feminism: The Issue of Accountability" to first define accountability negatively; accountability is not: 1) "beating oneself up for one's history, culture, Freudian slips," 2) "believing that apologizing for unintended slights is enough," and 3) "claiming that the past is the past and, thus, has no effect on the present" (31). Defining accountability in the positive, Ratcliffe says:

> A logic of accountability tries to interrupt our excuses of not being personally accountable *at present* for existing cultural situations that originated *in the past* (e.g., personal excuses such as "I have

> never denied a woman a promotion" or "My family never owned slaves"). (31)

These knee-jerk excuses take the focus off of one's own part in a larger systemic problem and therefore prevent one from practicing accountability. There are many obstacles to practicing accountability, particularly for those socialized in the United States. According to Ratcliffe, the logic of accountability runs counter to the dominant ideology of individualism, which as writer Erik Khzmalyan asserts "seems ubiquitous in America" (Khymalyan 1). As residents of the United States, we have been conditioned to invest in individualism because America is the seat of capitalism. The term capitalist is ultimately derived from the Latin root "caput" which means "head" or "top" ("Capital"). (Coincidentally, "caput" also means "broken" in German and is Tupac spelled backwards.) The etymology of "capital" implies the nature of capitalism: domination. So to embrace accountability is to resist the very ideological, racial, political, and economic foundation of this country, and therefore also to resist violence.

In practical terms, to be accountable means recognizing that each and every one of us is, "at present, culturally implicated in the effects of the past (via our resulting privileges…) and, thus, accountable for what we do about situations now, even if we are not responsible for their origins" (Ratcliffe 32). For example, we may not have caused, cannot control, or cure the social disease of white supremacy, but we can hold ourselves accountable for the ways in which we reproduce it everyday by first acknowledging we are implicated in the problem.[7] As individuals and actors in larger social systems, we are complicit in the "interlocking systems of oppressions"

[7] This basic line of thinking comes from the Al Anon program about the family disease of alcoholism.

and therefore we must practice accountability, again and again and again (The Combahee 1). For me, this process began when I learned about white fragility and white privilege and also the white roots of my neighborhood. Borrowing words from writer Koa Beck, who is a biracial American woman, "I live daily with a pronounced array of privileges that are coupled with the assumption that I am white" (Beck 2). bell hooks says that accountability is *the* issue that haunts the movement to end violence against women (hooks). Accountability may also be the key to recovering from anti-intersectional thinking and endeavoring towards peacemaking (hooks, Zeilinger).

Let me offer an example of this accountability logic at work as it relates to other moves of rhetorical listening. Audre Lorde embodies rhetorical listening when she visited Grenada in 1984 just a few months after the United States' military invasion. In her reflection, "Grenada Revisited" in *Sister Outsider,* she wrote:

> I came to Grenada my second time six weeks after the invasion…wanting to examine what my legitimate position as a concerned Grenadian-American was toward the military invasion of this tiny Black nation by the mighty U.S. I looked around me, talked with Grenadians on the street, the shops, the beaches, on porches in the solstice twilight. Grenada is their country. I am only a relative. I must listen long and hard and ponder the implications of what I have heard, or be guilty of the same quick arrogance of the U.S. government believing there are external solutions to Grenada's future. (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 188-189)

Lorde recognizes that while she may identify with Grenadians on the basis of their shared ancestry (Lorde's mother is Grenadian), there are also important differences between them. Firstly, Lorde is a citizen of the government which invaded Grenada. She is aware of the ways

in which Americans have been conditioned to "solve" other peoples' "problems" or try to save people rather than simply listen (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 189). Resisting this impulse, she sets an intention to listen to the way Grenadians define themselves and their situation. Lorde takes a stance of "openness" toward the people of Grenada, which is the cornerstone of listening. She meets them where they are at (literally and figuratively): "on the street, in the shops, the beaches, on porches" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 189). She pays attention to their stories and how they tell them. She stays open to the possibility that she was wrong about how the Grenadians viewed the U.S. In so doing, she resisted taking away their power of self-definition. Her reflection of the trip focuses on the violent language surrounding the U.S. invasion, calling on us to "listen to the language that came from the Pentagon" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 183). We can learn from Lorde that listening is vital if we want to dismantle systems of domination and particularly when we have different privilege(s) and differences in lived experience than those we wish to build community with.

In another example, in one of her unpublished writings called "Poetry Makes Something Happen," Audre Lorde implies an obstacle to listening is the inability to have empathy (*I Am Your Sister* 184-185). Remember, in the words of Herman Beavers, "listening...represents an avenue to empathy" (1). I've heard the term empathy used interchangeably with sympathy. But by definition, empathy is "The quality or power of projecting one's personality into or mentally identifying oneself with an object of contemplation, and so fully understanding or appreciating it" ("empathy, n."). Delineating the difference between sympathy and empathy, Lorde notes:

> It is hard to feel anger and fury and frustration and grief. It is so much easier to remain emotionally aloof or to indulge in the quick

> emotional jerk-off that passes as sentiment so often. It is hard to accept the tragedy of children shot in the streets of Soweto as our tragedy. We are paid very well to refuse to feel. We are paid in poisonous creature comforts, we are paid in false securities, in the spurious belief that tenure might mean survival, that the knock at midnight will always be on somebody else's door. (*I Am Your Sister* 184-185)

Empathy, then, involves all four moves of rhetorical listening that Ratcliffe identifies (17). Lorde relates to the reader who seems to be thinking "it is hard to feel." She recognizes where we're coming from and meets us there. She recognizes that listening to one's feelings is "basically a subversive activity" (Lorde, *I Am Your Sister* 184). She also recognizes that we all have a choice, encouraging us to push beyond our apathy or even "knee-jerk" sympathetic responses to instead practice empathy (Lorde, *I Am Your Sister* 185). And as if to guess our next question, she shows us what empathy looks like by "proceeding from an accountability logic" (Ratcliffe 26). She writes:

> As we sit here now, Black children and university students are being imprisoned and tortured and killed on the streets and in the prisons of South Africa. We are not separate from that horror. It has happened before in New York, it has happened in Chicago, it has happened in Jackson, Mississippi, it has happened in Ohio, and it will happen again. How many of us feel these tragedies as our own? Yet we are intimately and vitally involved with them. How many of us recognize that they will continue to re-occur until we act, until we use our power, whoever and wherever we are, against these horrors?" (Lorde, *I Am Your Sister* 185)

Lorde is not identifying a need to intellectualize or rationalize or explain the politics of apartheid and other expressions of racism, though this might also be helpful. We must learn how to feel our own emotions and also those of others. This is not the same as knowing intellectually that

people are suffering. For this kind of knowing is not enough to make us act. Knowing something intellectually is not the same as knowing something on an emotional level and feeling connected to it. As emotional beings, there is very little else in this world that makes us act than what affects us directly or indirectly. Without feeling these tragedies as intimately as though they were our own, Lorde suggests, what would motivate us to act? To listen?

Chapter Two: On Peacemaking
On listening to violence with an intersectional lens

In April 2016, Haruka Weiser, a freshman student at the University of Texas at Austin was sexually assaulted and murdered in Waller Creek on her way back to her dorm from dance practice (KEYE). I was writing this chapter at the time. I felt the loss and was reminded of being a woman walking around campus after dark. It reminded me that being female-bodied in a patriarchal world can get you killed. Some saw Weiser's murder as an inexplicable" and shocking isolated incident that was tragic. Others linked this case of sexual assault and murder to a "broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a class" and raised questions about providing women safety (Crenshaw 1241). Indeed, Weiser's family responded to the tragedy, saying "if her death can somehow make it safer for a young woman to walk home, if it will prevent another assault or murder, then at least we could find some meaning behind an otherwise senseless and tragic death" (KEYE). And often times this is where the analysis ends. Our tendency to focus on direct acts of violence against women through a single-axis lens (e.g. gender) rather than consider the systemic and rhetorical nature of violence obscures important intersections (e.g. gender, class, race, sexuality) that cannot be ignored. The process of peacemaking involves unmasking those hidden intersections in order to prevent symbolic violence.

So, to begin, I want to highlight some of the ways the rhetoric itself which surrounded her murder carried violence. After saying her name a few times, I realized I didn't know how to pronounce it. And it seemed neither did anyone else. So I went to Google and I came across a

reflection on Haruka Weiser by a person named Jackie Roth ("I Remember the First Time" 1). She comments:

> I remember the first time I hung out with Haruka Weiser. "Sometimes when I don't feel like explaining my name to people, I just tell them it's Monica," she said. "It basically sounds the same, just replace the M and N with an H and R." That conversation reverberated through my head at her campus memorial service, as speakers unknowingly mispronounced her name one after the other. ("I Remember the First Time" 1)

The speakers' intentions were no doubt to honor a victim of violence. Indeed, saying her name is a form of remembrance and respect. However, the people who mispronounced her name without inquiring how to say it correctly may have been blind to the harmful impact of the constant mispronunciation of her name. This one unintentional act constitutes a form of symbolic violence known as a racial microaggression (Mazewski).

Micro-aggression is a term coined by Harvard professor Chester Pierce in the 1970s to describe the everyday "racial assaults" by white people towards black people that run through our rhetoric (Solórzano 121). Since the 70s, this term has been used to describe micro acts of aggression against other marginalized groups of people as well (Solórzano 121). These micro acts of aggression are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Ceja et al. 60-61). As the term suggests, while these acts may be unintentional, they cause harm. According to a recent study, "mispronouncing a child's name could have lasting effects" (Mazewski). Indeed,

> While it may seem like just a name, it is actually a very large part of our identity. Your name displays your heritage. It makes you proud of your family and where you come from. …when someone's name is mispronounced it is like the person who is saying it wrong is saying that the child's heritage doesn't matter. This is especially true if there is no action taken to correct the problem. (Mazewski)

Weiser experienced the mispronunciation of her name on an everyday basis (Juarez). And this experience can induce anxiety and cause low self-esteem (Mazewski). Indeed it can feel like your "identity is being chipped away little by little" (Mazewski). While rape culture and murder constitutes violence, the constant mispronunciation of Weiser's name demonstrates the everydayness of the nuanced violence we participate in, wittingly or unwittingly.

There are ways, however, that we can think and talk about this case of physical violence without reproducing symbolic violence and instead promote peacemaking. One way we do this is by paying attention to the ways in which Weiser's death simultaneously garnered sympathy for Weiser as a victim of gender-based violence and also unleashed a flood of white rage and racist comments on twitter, facebook, and in the comment section of news articles. Consider the rhetorical framework of a blogger, Orbala, who wrote an article titled "How Not to Talk About Haruka Weiser" in the wake of Weiser's murder. In it, she highlights the nuances and complexities surrounding the case:

> What happened to Haruka is inexcusable, completely wrong and unacceptable, and devastating to no end. May she rest in peace, and may her family find comfort and strength to cope with the loss. She appears to have touched so many lives, and she was undoubtedly a beloved to anyone who knew her. Unfortunately, also, the way people are talking about the murder is just horrible. The primary suspect is a 17-year-old homeless black [teen], and so

> we can all imagine what the response would be – from "Give him the death penalty!" to "hahahah #BlackLivesMatter still?!" As if the tragedy itself isn't disturbing enough, bigots are using this as an opportunity to promote and perpetuate their racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, classist, anti-black attitudes. That the suspect is a black homeless "African" teen…, a victim of racist, classist, capitalist systems of oppression, breaks my heart. (Orbala)

There are multiple dimensions to this case of peacemaking rhetoric: 1) Orbala's article, 2) the comments on Orbala's article, and 3) the context which shaped the language around Weiser's murder. A more nuanced and intersectional analysis of the rhetoric surrounding Weiser's death embodies intersectionality.

One person left a comment on the article, criticizing Orbala for attempting to "shove political correctness down everybody's throat" (Orbala). But as Toni Morrison famously said, "What I think the political correctness debate is really about is the power to be able to define. The definers want the power to name. And the defined are now taking that power away from them" (Petrow). Orbala's definition of how one should or should not speak about Weiser's murder calls into question who we demonize in society. Her intersectional analysis of the direct violence that resulted in Weiser's death sheds light on the "racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, classist, anti-black attitudes" people had towards the alleged murderer, who was a black teen. Orbala also empathized with the suspect, and the Black Lives Matter movement who would be indicted with him. Her article was an act of political solidarity with the homeless community in Austin and the Black Lives Matter movement, who were scapegoated in the wake of Weiser's murder. In this way, Orbala humanizes the entire situation and all the actors involved. This nuanced analysis is critical if we are to confront symbolic violence and endeavor towards peace.

In the comments section of Orbala's article, another person wrote: "…using this tragedy as a spring board to talk about racial inequity is in poor taste" (Orbala). While another followed with: 'If you want to respect the life of this girl, don't make it a race issue. I'm not saying there's not a race issue in the United States. There's racism everywhere. It's not here though. This was not a hate crime. One person murdered another. And it's sad' (Orbala). Weiser's murder is a tragedy. Raising questions about other important dimensions of violence surrounding her death does not take away from this fact. The trouble with a comment like this is that it embodies a contradiction: racism is "everywhere," but not "here" (Alexander). This person's plea is an example of a "single-axis" or "single issue" analysis of violence embedded in white feminism (Zeilinger). The idea that addressing the racist rhetoric surrounding Weiser's suspected murderer is distracting or somehow not germane to the discussion (i.e. "mak[ing] it a race issue") demonstrates that, for white people, racism is hard to hear because we think it doesn't really exist.

For some, this tragedy represents an isolated incident. But the real story is the legacy of slavery and white supremacy. The nuanced rhetoric surrounding Weiser's murder is like an echo, reverberating classic stereotypes about innocent white women and dangerous black men that were born in the white supremacist American film, *Birth of a Nation* (DuVernay 00:04:11-00:08:30). The media portrayed Weiser as a white woman, though she is half Japanese ("I Remember the First Time"). And the suspect who allegedly sexually assaulted and murdered her

was a "black male," named Meechaiel Khalil Criner (KEYE).[8] The juxtaposition of Weiser's white innocence and the suspect's alleged black criminality triggers a familiar narrative: 'the myth of the black rapist,' to quote Angela Davis (Bhandar, DuVernay 00:04:11-00:08:30). In her groundbreaking book, *Women, Race, and Class,* Davis talks about how "…the violent hypersexual black male caused scores of lynchings during the antebellum era in America. This persistent racist myth provides explanatory value for the contemporary overrepresentation of black men in prisons convicted of rape…." (Bhandar). And since Weiser was killed in the state of Texas within the United States, this is even more relevant.

Texas has one of the highest prison populations in the U.S. And the U.S. is what the ACLU calls "the world's largest jailer" ("The Prison"). There is ample evidence that black and other people of color are convicted of crimes at disproportionately higher rates and serve disproportionately longer sentences than white people, for economic purposes (DuVernay 00:02:43-00:04:30). Highlighting the horror of Weiser's sexual assault in a way that reinscribes the very myth used to criminalize black youth and other youth of color is not neutral (Bhandar).

[8]As Orbala points out in her blog, "How Not to Talk About Haruka Weiser," "First and most important, Meechaiel is currently a suspect, not proven to be guilty. His arrest affidavit states that the police have "good reasons to believe and do believe" that Meechaiel committed the crime. They have not actually proven that he's the killer. There is evidence leading to that conclusion, but legally speaking, we need to be careful when talking about this." And even if he is tried and found guilty, that still does not necessarily mean he actually committed the crime for which he was charged. At this point it is common knowledge that people of color and in particular Black people are criminalized and even killed, as Claudia Rankine writes, "simply for being black: no hands in your pockets, no playing music, no sudden movements, no driving your car, no walking at night, no walking in the day, no turning onto this street, no entering this building, no standing your ground, no standing here, no standing there, no talking back, no playing with toy guns, no living while black" (146). Furthermore, the suspect in question is not a "man"; seventeen-year-olds are generally considered teens.

And so, erasing Weiser's Asian-American identity and reinforcing her whiteness and her "beauty" was used as a code for innocence. Where she was portrayed as "white" and "beautiful," the person who allegedly did direct violence to her was seen as all the more violent by comparison.[9] Indeed, we cannot talk about Weiser's murder without also talking about the language of white supremacy and the legacy of racist myths. An intersectional analysis calls into question the legitimacy of calling for gender justice for a "white (actually mixed) woman" while at the same time calling for the further criminalization of a young black teen in the era of mass incarceration and also the criminalization of the homeless community near campus (Alexander, Easter).

Returning to the question of Weiser's race, if the media had not perceived Weiser as white, I wonder, how would the media have described her death? What if Weiser was a trans woman of color? Would they have covered it at all? Would we have even said her name?[10] Indeed, I didn't hear about Monica Loera, the trans Latina who was murdered in Austin, Texas just three months before Weiser's death (Adams). Her name barely made the news despite the fact that 2015 was the deadliest year for trans women of color (Adams). As a friend reminded me, Weiser's death is a tragedy; and also, so are the deaths of countless Latinx and Black trans women whose deaths (and lives) do not receive the same degree of public attention and

[9] I learned how to read images as rhetoric and about the politics of representation in Christen Smith's *Anthropology for Liberation?* class at UT Austin.

[10] This is something the #SayHerName twitter hashtag has brought to our attention. We often say the names of murdered Black men. But we don't as often know, let alone say, the names of the Black women and other women of color who are victims of state violence.

collective mourning that Weiser's garnered simply because she was a perceived as a white woman.

This leads me to an important feature of violence: context (Karim and Lawrence 4). As Aisha Karim and Bruce Lawrence note: Violence always has a context….Context shapes not just the actors or the victims but also those who represent them" (4). This is why intersectionality, as a theoretical framework and rhetorical tool, is vital. It makes visible the hand that shapes the actors, victims, and their representations, and also how we interpret them. When we're outraged at the murders of white women but we don't also pay attention to the violence against trans and queer women of color, we are not endeavoring to end sexism and violence against women; we are instead upholding racism and white supremacy. As Judith Butler notes, "Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" (14). For this reason, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi coined the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter.

Chapter Three: On Violence
On not listening

On February 26, 2016, Hillary Clinton held an event in a private home in Charleston, South Carolina, to raise funds for her candidacy for President of the United States. Speaking to an almost entirely white audience, Hillary Clinton discussed the need for "body cameras" and "police and criminal justice reform" (#NotASuperpredator). During the event, a Black Lives Matter organizer, Ashley Williams, moved to the front of the audience and held up a sign which read: "We have to bring them to heel. #WhichHillary?" (#NotASuperpredator).

Figure 3: Photograph taken from an article titled ""I'm not a Superpredator, Hillary!": Black Lives Matter protestors confront Clinton at South Carolina fundraiser" from *Salon*. http://www.salon.com/2016/02/25/im_not_a_superpredator_hillary_black_lives_matter_protestors_crash_clinton_south_carolina_fundraiser/.

The quote is taken from a speech Hillary Clinton gave in 1994 which many scholars and advocates say contributed significantly to the criminalization and mass incarceration of black

youth and other youth of color (DuVernay 00:36:00-00:46:13). The hashtag #WhichHillary refers to the sort of doublespeak that Clinton had been caught doing since she began running for president. The rhetoric surrounding Williams' direct action helps us understand the relationship between the rhetoric of (not) listening and the symbolic violence of white supremacy. It may also help us recognize calls/invitations to listen.

But first let me backtrack to 1994. In a speech recorded on C-SPAN, Hillary Clinton promoted a crime bill by saying: "These are not just gangs of kids anymore. They are often the kinds of kids that are called super-predators. No conscience, no empathy. We can talk about why they ended up that way but first we have to bring them to heel" (#NotASuperpredator). According to Williams, "...that quote was important not only because it was [Hillary Clinton's] own words, but because that was her pathologizing black youth as these criminal, animal people" (Gearan). "I wanted her to be confronted with that very racist thing she said," Williams continued (Gearan). Indeed, in her speech, Clinton invoked the theory of "super predators" coined by John J. DiIulio, a Princeton professor and criminologist, but has since been discredited for its completely false assumptions. Xavier Elrath-Bey, a scholar who has conducted clinical research with at-risk youth and who was also incarcerated for over 13 years because of the super-predator theory had the following to say about its legitimacy:

> A handful of criminologists, using apocalyptic language, claimed that kids would be responsible for a dramatic increase in violent crime during the 1990s. Such kids would be impulsive and remorseless. Black and Latino youth would be the center of that explosion in violence, according to the theory….But…The rate of violent crimes committed by young people declined dramatically and is still going down. Today, the juvenile crime rate is at a 30-

> year low. Yet, we continue to live with the effects of this flawed theory, which dehumanized our children. (McElrath-Bey)

Indeed, the superpredator theory has since been discredited for its baseless and racist assumptions about Black and Latinx youth. Franklin E. Zimring, the director of the University of Berkeley's Earl Warren Legal Institute, commented that "[DiIulio's] prediction wasn't just wrong, it was exactly the opposite" (Becker). He even went so far as to call DiIulio's theory "utter madness" (Becker). Even DiIulio himself came to realize his theory was wrong and harmful (Becker). Remember, this is the same man who thought that "some prisons are virtual resorts" (Becker).

Clinton's use of what Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* terms "racially coded rhetoric" fits into a larger political context in which Black and Latinx people are criminalized for the purpose of exploiting their labor (DuVernay 00:02:43-00:04:30). The origins of the current and ongoing crisis of mass incarceration date back to the civil war when one form of forced labor via slavery ended and the era of mass incarceration was born (DuVernay 00:21:00-00:30:00). A number of scholars and activists have highlighted the process of "re-enslavement" of Black Americans, and most recently in the documentary *13th*.[11] Mass incarceration is now widely considered "slavery by

[11] The title, *13th*, refers to the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution which states: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." As this documentary suggests, the second clause creates a loophole which was ultimately used to re-enslave people who were convicted of a crime. The documentary defines slavery as an economic system which was never in fact abolished with the passage of the 13th amendment. There is ample evidence that Latinx and Black people are convicted of crimes at

another name" to quote the title of Douglas A. Blackmon's book. Hillary Clinton's rhetoric helped set in motion the very problem of mass incarceration which she was saying needed fixing.

And many had forgotten this fact until February 24, 2016 when Ashley Williams spoke truth to power and another BLM activist filmed so that the world could see and hear Clinton's response. The video of Williams' protest went viral. A number of major news outlets including *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *CNN*, *MSNBC*, and *Washington Post* picked up the story and the video now has over 1.6 million views on YouTube. There are several rhetorical aspects to the short video. The audience, the physical space, the principal rhetors (Williams, Clinton), the historical context and geographic significance of Charleston, South Carolina. The following is a transcript of the 2 minute exchange between Williams and Clinton.

> Williams**:** We want you to apologize for mass incarceration.
> Clinton**:** OK. We'll talk about it.
> Williams**:** I'm not a super predator, Hillary Clinton.
> Clinton**:** OK, fine. We'll talk about it.
> Williams**:** Can you apologize to black people for mass incarceration?
> Clinton**:** Well, can I talk? And then maybe you can listen to what I say.
> [Audience: Hissing, Booing.]
> Williams**:** Yes, yes, absolutely.
> Clinton**:** OK, fine. Thank you very much. Um, there's a lot of issues, a lot of issues in this campaign. The very first speech that I gave back in April was about criminal justice reform…
> Williams: You called black people super-predators.
> [Audience: Shhh. You're being rude. That's not appropriate.]
> Williams: You called black people super-predators. That's rude.
> [Audience Member: This is not appropriate. You're trespassing.]
> Clinton**:** Do you want to hear the facts or do you just want to talk?

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disproportionately higher rates than white people for committing the exact same offenses, which speaks to the racialized nature of this amendment.

> Williams**:** I know that you called black youth super-predators in 1994. Please explain your record. Explain it to us. You owe black people an apology.
> [Audience member A: You're trespassing.
> Audience member B: Let her speak. Let her speak.
> Audience member C: Excuse us. That's inappropriate.]
> Clinton**:** Well, I'll tell you what, if you will give me a chance to talk, I'll—I'll tell you something. You know what? Nobody's ever asked me before. You're the first person to ask me, and I'm happy to address it, but you are the first person to ask me, dear.
> [Clinton's body guards physically remove Williams from the room.]
> Clinton: Um, OK, back to the issues.
> Audience: Yes. Thank you. [Applause].
> Clinton: The issues that I think are important….
> (#NotASuperpredator)

Invoking the rhetoric of accountability, Ashley said: "We want you to apologize for mass incarceration….Can you apologize to black people for mass incarceration?" To which Hillary Clinton responded, "We'll talk about it" and repeated almost immediately, "Ok, fine. We'll talk about it" (#NotASuperpredator). From Clinton's words, one can almost be fooled into thinking Clinton was actually open talking about it. But as American hip hop recording artist and social and political activist, Killer Mike commented, Clinton is really saying "shut up, I'll talk to you later" ("Killer Mike"). Indeed, "later" has a particular meaning in this context. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote in his *A Letter from A Birmingham Jail*: "For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant 'Never.' We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied" (King Jr.).

Clinton's body language communicates a stance of closed-ness. She backed away from Williams and held up her hand as if to say: "this conversation is closed." When Williams persists, resisting the imposition of silence, Clinton interrupts them: "Well, can I talk? And then maybe you can listen to what I say."[12] Her eyes wide she nearly shouts: "Do you want to hear the facts or do you just want to talk?" (#NotASuperpredator). The tone of Clinton's voice is incensed and condescending. Hip Hop artist Sister Souljah pointed out the nature of this condescension in a recent interview, asserting: "[Hillary Clinton] reminds me too much of the slave plantation white wife of the white 'Master.' She talks down to people, is condescending and pandering" (Howard). When I first saw the video of Williams' direct action at Clinton's fundraiser, I had this thought too. In this case, Clinton's condescending tone echoes histories of anti-black domination and violence.

Clinton's verbal and nonverbal behavior in this interaction demonstrates what Dr. Robin DiAngelo calls "white fragility" (DiAngelo "White Fragility"). DiAngelo suggests that "[white people] perceive any attempt to connect us to the system of racism as a very unsettling and unfair moral offense" (DiAngelo "Why It's So Hard to Talk"). When confronted with "racial discomfort,"

> whites typically respond as if something is "wrong," and blame the person or event that triggered the discomfort (usually a person of color). This blame results in a socially-sanctioned array of responses towards the perceived source of the discomfort,

[12] On a blog written by Ashley Williams, I read that *their* gender pronouns are "they/them" rather than "she/her" which a lot of the news outlets have used. For this reason, I will refer to Williams as "they, them."

> including: penalization; retaliation; isolation and refusal to continue engagement. (DiAngelo "Why It's So Hard To Talk")

To understand the dynamics in this interaction, we have to understand how differences in power influence the rhetoric of listening. Indeed, as Bim Adewunmi posited in an interview with Kimberlé Crenshaw in April 2014, "At the end of the day, it really is a question of power: who has the power to end the debate? To walk away? To say, 'I'm done talking about it, and I can go on with my rhetoric in a 'business as usual' kind of response?'" (Adewunmi). Whereas Williams is listening rhetorically, Clinton's response demonstrates a refusal to listen. And as DiAngelo suggests, this is not an isolated incident; under white supremacy, white people are conditioned not to listen to the voices of people of color (DiAngelo "White Fragility").

The context of this rhetorical exchange may help us understand why. The concept of identification, which is key to listening, is linked with the physical place in which this interaction occurs (Ratcliffe 23). According to Ratcliffe, "…theorists of identification tend to agree with Judith Butler that identification always invokes 'an assumption of place'…[and] because people are always historically and culturally situated, so, too, are their embodied identifications—hence the linkage of identification with *place"* (Ratcliffe 23). To understand what this means, consider the following image:

Figure 4: Photograph taken from an article titled ""I'm not a Superpredator, Hillary!": Black Lives Matter protestors confront Clinton at South Carolina fundraiser" from *Salon*. http://www.salon.com/2016/02/25/im_not_a_superpredator_hillary_black_lives_matter_protestors_crash_clinton_south_carolina_fundraiser/

[Image description]: Hillary R. Clinton is in the center of a large room speaking to what appears to be an entirely white audience who are dressed in business formal attire.] According to Anderson, author of an article titled "The White Space," many spaces in America are still "overwhelmingly white…a situation that reinforces a normative sensibility in settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present" (Anderson). Consistent with the logic of "the white space," Clinton's rhetorical acts are designed to silence Williams or push them to remain passive while other audience members tell Williams they have no right to speak and do not belong—that they are "trespassing." (Anderson, #NotASuperpredator).

After attempting to silence Williams in active ways, Clinton changes her approach. Arms folded, straight-faced, Clinton becomes unresponsive to Williams' speech and appears shut down. Generally, being shut down and closed to a "person, text, or culture" is the antithesis of Ratcliffe's conception of rhetorical listening (17). But, in particular, Clinton is perceived as being attacked by Williams. Thus, Clinton's nonverbal rhetoric represents a strategic move designed to evoke a sympathetic response from her primarily white audience. Indeed, her embodied rhetoric had precisely this effect as audience members are heard saying to Williams: "That's inappropriate," "you're being rude," and, "You're trespassing" (#NotASuperpredator). In an interview with the Washington Post, Williams explains: "As a black queer person, I understand how I don't always get to be in control of how I'm perceived in spaces….I'm especially not always in control of the way I'm perceived when I'm raising my voice to speak out against injustices. So I'm not surprised that I was told that I was being rude" (Gearan).

At the end of the exchange, two secret service agents grab Ashley Williams' arm and waist and remove them from the space, as Clinton shouts, "No one has ever asked me that before. You are the first person to ask me that" (#NotASuperpredator). Accountability involves a process of self-reflection and self-criticism, without which knowledge of one's complicity in systemic violence would be impossible. It also involves listening to people when they tell you where you are causing harm unwittingly and taking responsibility. Indeed, as Audre Lorde shared in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches,* "If I participate, knowingly or otherwise, in my sister's oppression and she calls me on it, to answer her anger with my own only blankets the substance of our exchange with reaction. It wastes energy. And yes, it is very difficult to stand

still and to listen to another woman's voice delineate an agony I do not share, or one to which I myself have contributed" (Lorde, *Sister Outsider* 128). But this is how we listen. At the very moment Clinton was given the opportunity to be responsible, she refused to listen.

Once Williams was out of earshot, Clinton returned to her almost entirely white audience and said "back to the issues." Chillingly, Hillary Clinton's use of "rhetoric" is at the heart of the issue (DuVernay 00:02:43-00:04:30). Clinton's use of the term "super-predator" paints a particular kind of "mental image," or as Kenneth Burke calls "terministic screen," about black and other youth of color (Herrick 210). By associating them with animals at the top of the food chain, "super-predators," Clinton strips them of all other facets of their identity in order to construct them as a two-dimensional "social menace" (*13th*). And once one constructs an "enemy image," it is very easy to 1) demonize them and 2) claim being victimized by them ("Dehumanization"). Both the projection of an "enemy image" and the rhetorician's appeal to victimhood function to negate the possibility for any accountability on the part of the speaker. This is in fact Williams' central criticism of Hillary Clinton: she refuses to be accountable for her racist rhetoric. In all these ways, Hillary Clinton embodies a rhetoric that speaks but will not listen.

Let me say a few words about the significance of the geographic and historical context in which this interaction took place. Charleston was in the news just months before this event because of the Charleston Church Massacre in which a 21-year-old white man named Dylann Storm Roof went into the historically black Emanuel A.M.E. Church and gunned down nine

black church members including the pastor after saying: "You rape our women and you're taking over our country. And you have to go" (Foster). According to the Director of the Southern Poverty Law Center, Roof's logic "reflected a major topic on white supremacist Internet forums" ("Dylan"). It is the logic that says: "whites are being hugely victimized by blacks and no one is paying attention" ("Dylan").

The rhetorical exchange between Ashley Williams and Hillary Clinton cannot be extricated from the U.S.'s historical roots in slavery and white supremacy. Borrowing words from writer Claudia Rankine, "Dylann Storm Roof did not create himself from nothing. He has grown up with the rhetoric and orientation of racism. He, along with the rest of us…" (146). Clinton's "racially coded rhetoric" in the 90s and failure to listen to Williams in 2016 is consistent with the very rhetoric of white supremacy that inspired Dylann Roof to murder innocent Black church members (DuVernay 00:02:43-00:04:30). In other words, all white people drink from the same culture. White supremacy in America is as nuanced as this rhetorical exchange between Williams and Clinton and as overt as Roof's massacre that occurred less than a year before in the same city. The violence of white supremacy is ubiquitous; and it produces poor listeners as a by-product.

Conclusion
Listening in a Time of War

Activist and writer Wagatwe Wanjuki once said: "feminists must take concrete steps towards intersectionality and both 'walk the walk and talk the talk'" (Zeilinger). But as Franchesca Ramsey from MTV Decoded reminded us: "You can't exactly walk the walk if you have no idea where the walk even goes" (mtv). One way we begin to find out is by examining our privileges. "Challenging unearned privilege and power" is in fact one of the goals of rhetorical listening (Ratcliffe 16). This is, in part, where my exploration of listening began.

We had just watched a video interview with Dr. Joy DeGruy, author of *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, about white privilege when my mother asked me "what does slavery have to do with listening?" "You're doing a thesis on peacemaking rhetoric and listening…. but what does slavery have to do with it?" (World Trust). The question struck a deep chord in me. I sat down at my desk and wrote furiously. Following a hunch, I took to Google and came across an article titled: "The U.S. has 35,000 museums. Why is only one about slavery?" (Cummings III). That night I made plans with my *pareja* to drive to Wallace County, Louisiana to visit the Whitney Plantation—purportedly "the only" museum on American slavery (Cummings III).[13]

We arrived too late to go on the last museum tour of the day. So we opted to spend the afternoon in New Orleans (only 30 miles east) and take the tour in the morning. Once in New Orleans, my *pareja* suggested we go first to the Lower Ninth Ward. Beyonce's *Formation,* which displays footage from New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina, had just come out the week

[13] *Pareja* means partner in Spanish.

before. Police had just killed David Joseph, a seventeen–year-old Black youth in Austin, Texas. He was naked and unarmed.

We drove around the Lower Ninth Ward and at one intersection, we saw a small boat nestled in the high grass. And piles of rubble and broken wood. Seeing the boat and the damaged houses, I remembered that in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans was over three fourths underwater. Being there and seeing with our own eyes the lingering destruction, made me feel sick. Hurricane Katrina happened in 2005. This is 2016.

After eating gumbo in the French Quarter, we spent the night in a motel 20 miles down the Mississippi River from the Whitney Plantation, called "La Place." Neighboring hotels had names like "Plantation Inn" and "Legacy Suites"—it was a peculiar place. The motels along this road looked almost like the ones you'd see in a psychological thriller. That night, we reflected on what we'd seen—the houses still marked with Xs to identify survivors, the old houses standing beside new houses erected by celebrities in the Lower Ninth Ward, the people on their porches, and the disparity between the Lower Ninth Ward and the French Quarter.

We got up at 8am. As we crossed the Mississippi River we saw a sign that read: "Whitney Plantation: *The Story of Slavery*," with an arrow pointing right. It stood in between three other signs for bed and breakfasts on the neighboring plantations. We drove up to the white picket fence at the entrance, pulled into a large vacant parking lot, and signed up for the next tour. While we waited, we looked at the library of books they had about slavery. One was Dr. DeGruy's book that inspired me to go to the Whitney. And Ta-Nehisi Coastes' *Between the*

World and Me. Also a series on "Slave Narratives" with a quote on the cover that said: "the only person who can tell you about slavery is a slave." My *pareja* said you should read Baldwin.

At the beginning of the tour, we were each given a lanyard to hang around our neck. Each one had a picture of a clay statue of an enslaved Black child and on the back was a quote from an enslaved person who lived on the plantation. Mine bore the name of Hunton Love, who identified their age at "somewhere over 100." They said: "born at Bayou Lafourche on the plantation of john viguerie…we didn't leave the place often. When day's work wuz over, we wuz too tired to do enythin' but go to sleep-an'besides, we didn't know any outsiders. But if we did go, we had to have a pass or we'd be taken up. I worked in the cane juice place. Big boats stopped at our landin' an' they'd take on maybe 100 barrels of sugar, 400 bbls. Molasses at a time, sugar wuz king in those days."[14] I imagined all the capital Love helped accumulate over hours, days, and years of unpaid and forced labor in such a lucrative trade as sugar. And I remembered that slavery is economic system that endures to this day (DuVernay 00:02:00-00:04:00).

The tour made its first stop at the Antioch Baptist Church, which wasn't originally part of the plantation. On the website of the Whitney, it says:

> During this period in history, racism existed in ways that most of us have only read about. It was at this time that God called some brave men from the Paulina area to join together and form a burial society….The name Anti-Yoke was chosen for this society. This

[14] The lanyard included the source for this quotation: Camie G. Henry Research Center, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Federal Writers Project Folder 19.

> name spoke freedom - not tied or bound to anyone. …This building became known as the Anti-Yoke Baptist Church.

Inside the church, there were several life-like statues of children representing the young slaves who lived on the plantation. Some sat in the pews at the back of the church. Some stood in the isles. One was standing right next to where we sat down; his eyes penetrated mine. Though the ghosts of the children were invisible to me, I sensed I was not invisible to them. As we sat there in the church, my *pareja* was overcome with tears. She said there was something about that space that made her sob.

The next stops were the Wall of Honor and the Memorials Allees Gwendolyn Midlo Hall. They had hundreds of names of enslaved people who lived and labored on the Whitney Plantation—and also their words and stories. An enslaved woman named Ella Willson said: "I got a scar big as the place where my old mis' hit me. She took a bull whip once the bull whip had a piece of iron on it and she got mad. She was so mad she took the whip and hit me over the head with the butt end of it, and the blood flew. It run all down my back and dripped off my heels."[15] Henriette Butler said: "My damn old missis was mean as hell. You see dis finger here? Dere is where she bit it de day us was set free. Never will forget how she said, 'Come here, you little black bitch, you! And grabbed my finger and almost bit it off." There were hundreds of stories like this. White women wives of slave masters inflicting pain and violently obstructing the liberation of Black women.

[15] Quote engraved on the Wall of Honor at the Whitney Plantation.

The final stop: the master's house. Imagine. You've already passed through the quarters of enslaved Africans, and saw where they were forced to live. You passed the tree where the enslaved people were whipped—the same tree that appeared in a film years later. You have read quotes from enslaved African women talking about the cruelty of their white slave masters (men and women). And then you arrive at the master's house. And your guide tells you a story about how it came that a giant mural covered the living room ceiling. As the story goes, the slaver master's white wife invited a homeless Italian immigrant into her home out of the goodness of her heart. To thank her for her charity, the man painted her the beautiful mural. The double standard of sympathy is what was so disturbing to me. The slave master's wife had so much compassion for the homeless white immigrant but none for the African men and women who created her wealth. It's sometimes easier for us to think of slave masters and their white wives as cruel racist monsters and not as humans who could be just like us. But in the words of Ta-Nehisi Coates, "Racism is not merely a simplistic hatred. It is, more often, broad sympathy toward some and broader skepticism toward others…" (Coates).

The museum guide talked about how the enslaved Africans found ways to resist. To survive. However, the script of the tour never strayed from its historical accuracy as a piece of history rather than an example of race-based labor exploitation and slavery. The article celebrating the Whitney's debut said: "The Whitney Plantation presents the facts of slavery…. By providing a meaningful and factually accurate education about slavery, the Whitney Plantation hopes to begin righting some of the wrongs of our history" (Cummings III). I think we need place like the Whitney Plantation, to actually learn about the history of this country. So

we never forget. I also think we need to challenge the myth that slavery was in the past and we've progressed to a post-slavery society. According to race scholar, Tim Wise,

> Part of the problem is…in the way we teach history, we teach history in this country as this set of linear narratives: things were bad, good people got together, we fixed those things, now they're better. We don't teach them cyclically. We don't teach them in terms of themes that re-occur and come back around again….And so I think people who are bought into that narrative however, find it very difficult to systematize these problems because they're not thinking in a cyclical and circular and thematic way. They're thinking in a very linear way which doesn't really allow for the two steps backward. They can only see the three steps forward. (Rock Newman Show 11:40-12:04)

Listening rhetorically is like a hearing aid that helps us recognize the three steps forward *and also*, perhaps more importantly, the two steps back. And once we make this connection, I think, we realize that what we are learning is even more horrific precisely because it never ended.

Critical thought allows for us to walk through a supposedly progressive "museum" and refuse to be pacified – or at peace. On a wall inside the main building of the Whitney Plantation, there was an area set up for comments from visitors. Someone named Charles James wrote: "I hear the sounds of the dead children/We are the children of those survivors" (pariahs 9). Charles James was listening. The institution of slavery is within us and before us, not behind us. It is still alive and breathing even if it appears to have died. Colonization and slavery has not ended. And as individuals, we reproduce the very violence we think is behind us by not recognizing what is here in our midst presently.

The tour was in itself invented to tell *the* story of slavery. But describing the Whitney Plantation as "the story" of slavery perpetuates the myth of essentialism. There is no one story

on slavery. And there is also historical baggage with the concept of museums as sites of objective scientific and historical knowledge. This is something Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez Peña demonstrated in their "Couple in a Cage" performance, where they performed as stereotyped indigenous people in a cage within a museum and observed the behavior of the visitors (Heredia). Visitors rarely questioned the validity of the display in part because we are conditioned to take things at face value in the context of historical sites like museums. Even the fact that the plantation was called a "museum" was rhetorical. Museums often lay claims to objectivity. But museums have historically operated in tandem with colonization which functioned to erase certain narratives to privilege others (Heredia). With all this in mind, I think, it is worthy to recognize the value of the museum and also, at the same time, to be cautious about idealizing it as a marker of progress. Because, when it comes to the history, voices, and lives of the colonized, America has institutionalized not listening.

I share the experience of my trip to Wallace Country, Louisiana, because that is where listening rhetorically led me. I started researching peacemaking violence, non-violence, and rhetoric in the era of Black Lives Matter and a question about white privilege led me to realize my overwhelming ignorance about the legacy of anti-black slavery. It made me question why this ignorance persists. It also enabled me start thinking critically about slavery in a way that made me more alert to the ongoing "plantation culture" that continues to exist to this day (hooks). By listening, we start making connections. It helps us see how issues and problems are connected even if they don't immediately or linearly seem that way. And it is with this in mind

that I have come to understand listening as the work of being intersectional in our everyday lives – of walking the talk.

Epilogue

I was born in 1991. That was two years after the cold war ended and the year the gulf war began. That was also the year the Los Angeles Police Department beat the hell out of Rodney King for being Black. A quarter of a century later, the U.S. state is still at war with Black people. I started thinking about my thesis topic in the fall of 2014. That was the year Mike Brown was killed and Ferguson erupted. It was one year after Trayvon Martin's killer George Zimmerman was acquitted of cold-blooded murder and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter was born. And now we have witnessed the rebirth of both a mainstream neo-fascist white supremacist movement and a new generation of white feminists. We know that the U.S. state has murdered more Black men, women, trans, and gender queer people in 2015 than in the most deadly year of lynchings during Jim Crow (Merelli). Think about that.

We need only look to the composition of our neighborhoods, our classrooms, our peer groups, our churches, our workplaces, our organizations to realize that we do not actually live in a post-racial society. But nowhere is racism more insidious than in the purportedly progressive university spaces, like Plan II, which reflect the very "post-racial" rhetoric of denial that enables this violence to continue. And now that we, primarily white people, have elected a neo-fascist white supremacist misogynist xenophobic homophobic individual to represent this country for the next four years, perhaps it is time we understand that white supremacy is part of the substance of our American culture. bell hooks suggests all white women "know that whiteness is a privileged category" (hooks 55). She says it's not a problem of ignorance. It's a problem of denial (hooks 55). I think she's right.

Denial protects us from the painful reality that things are worse than they appear. In a letter to his son, Ta-Nehisi Coates wrote "…there exists, all around us, an apparatus urging us to accept American innocence at face value and not inquire too much. And it is so easy to look away, to live with the fruits of our history and to ignore the great evil done in all of our names" (Coates 8-9). Breaking this denial and interrogating the ways in which I collude with systems of violence has made me question almost everything about who I am and the nature of my relationships. Lorde knew this might feel "threatening" (*Sister Outsider* 112). James Baldwin knew this would be disorienting. Scholar Tina Grillo knew it could feel paralyzing (Grillo 16). In her essay, "Anti-essentialism and Intersectionality: Tools to Dismantle the Master's House," she wrote:

> sometimes the governing paradigms which have structured all of our lives are so powerful that we can think we are doing progressive work, dismantling the structures of racism and other oppressions, when in fact we are reinforcing the paradigms. These paradigms are so powerful that sometimes we find ourselves unable to talk at all, even or especially about those things closest to our hearts. (Grillo 16)

I've felt that throughout nearly the entire process of writing. But I took comfort in the words of Karim and Lawrence, who caution us to "avoid the danger of overindulgence in self-doubt, namely succumbing to individual or collective paralysis" (10). Self-reflection is hard but it is vital. And it is possible. As Mychal Denzel Smith points out, "We have the capacity for self-reflection if we're willing to tap into it." People have "evolved," he continues, as a result of "wrestling with their own discomfort" and, importantly, through "hard listening" (Smith 163).

I want to close with Alicia Garza's words about America: "Part of the discomfort around talking about Black Lives Matter is that it breaks open a fundamental contradiction in this country which is racism and white supremacy….Nobody wants to talk about race in a post-racial society. But this is a real deep seated disease that this country suffers from that infects all of our society and so when we nailed this piece around Black lives, we're actually trying to unlock the humanity of this country" (Gordon).

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Biography

Bianca Hinz-Foley Trejo was raised in Austin, Texas. Bianca has a number of academic interests, but her true education came from her experience as a United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) member and organizer for four years, working to build student-worker solidarity in a spirit of collective liberation both on and off campus. She is currently the Interim Executive Director of Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF) where she is privileged to continue a 17-year tradition of transnational solidarity with organized Mexican maquiladora workers on the border.